

BEAR FACTS

Planning Trends and Information from California State Parks

October 2003

The Future of Parks Both National and State Parks Alike

In an August 10 article in the San Francisco Chronicle, reporter Michael Milstein wonders what will be the future of the “crown jewels” of the National Park Service (NPS). These are their large, often remote, scenic parks like Yellowstone, Glacier, Yosemite and Great Smoky Mountains.

Overnight visits at the iconic nature parks are down 20% over the last ten years, a trend starting long before today's economic slump began. Statistically, this shortfall has been mitigated by growth in day use at the NPS's historic and urban sites, mainly in the east. One-day trips to National Parks, targeting close-to-home units, are replacing multi-day trips to distant sites. Overall, the total number of visits to National Parks have been static in recent years.

There appear to be many reasons for these trends. Initially, we are looking at the traditional park user base and finding people who:

- ◆ Are working longer hours these days, and taking shorter vacations which allow them less time to get to and stay in remote parks for any period of time
- ◆ Are not willing or able to pay the increasing costs of travel and lodging
- ◆ Are demographically white, affluent and educated, a group that is becoming a smaller part of today's society
- ◆ Are getting older and want to be pampered

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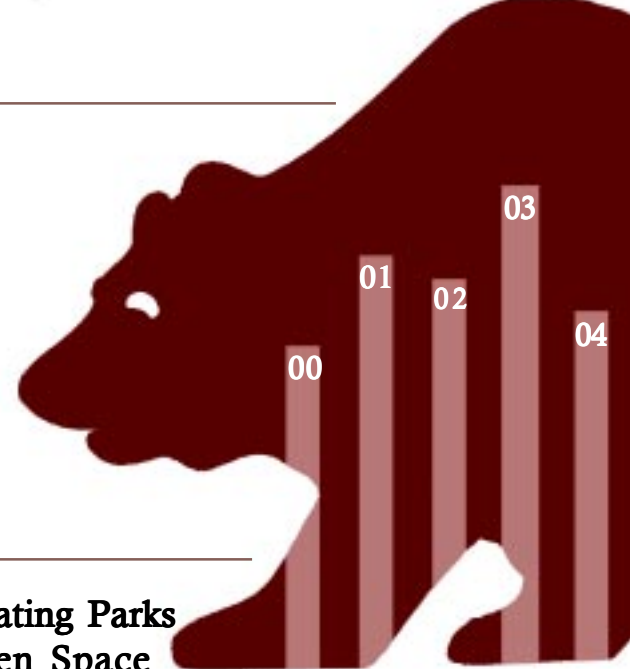
Coordinating Parks and Open Space with Housing and Community Development

Land use planning in California is a process of working through complex issues and demands on limited land resources. At a recent public meeting about a housing project in Southern California, a question was raised about a conflict between the State's programs that encourage in-fill and “smart growth” and State programs that set aside land for parks and open space.

In an effort to coordinate and better understand these issues, Director Ruth Coleman asked the Planning Policy and Programming Committee of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to meet with Cathy Creswell, Deputy Director, Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). The goal of the meeting was to build a better understanding of the each agency's mission and find some possibilities for mutual support.

Cathy Creswell noted that encouraging in-fill and smart growth provides greater opportunities for preserving land. She also stressed that community development goes beyond housing. Through a recent grants program, HCD administered \$25 million to 114 communities that qualified. Many of these communities chose to use the funds for parks and recreation because the funds were available for public facilities and infrastructure. In another example of community development, HCD has been working with Cal Trans on projects to reduce traffic congestion.

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with high-end lodges and spas, not sleep in a tent or RV

Second, millions of other people, traditionally not park users, who might start going to National Parks or go more frequently than they do now are people who:

- ◆ Are among the growing numbers of people whose ethnicity and cultural background, current interests and economic capability do not include traveling long distances to destination parks or spending the night in the out-of-doors
- ◆ Are young adults who, as children, were not taken camping by their parents, the principal way by which individuals have been introduced to this activity
- ◆ Are interested in doing a wider variety of things at parks than mainly looking at the scenery or engaging in a limited set of outdoor recreation activities
- ◆ Are getting their "nature" in the comfort and safety of their homes by means of TV, video and computers

National Park Service officials are concerned that they will be unable to maintain a solid and useful place in a changing society. Their long-term political sustainability will rely on the continuation of the broad, deep public support it has enjoyed in the past. This support must come from the parks' visitors, from campers and day users alike. Unfortunately, there are hints that this public support is not as broad or as deep as it has been, and that the trends that foster this situation are becoming stronger.

The article cited a few proposals to make the Service and its diverse parks more relevant to the needs and interests of tomorrow's citizens, and thus more likely to get their involvement and support. Among these suggestions are:

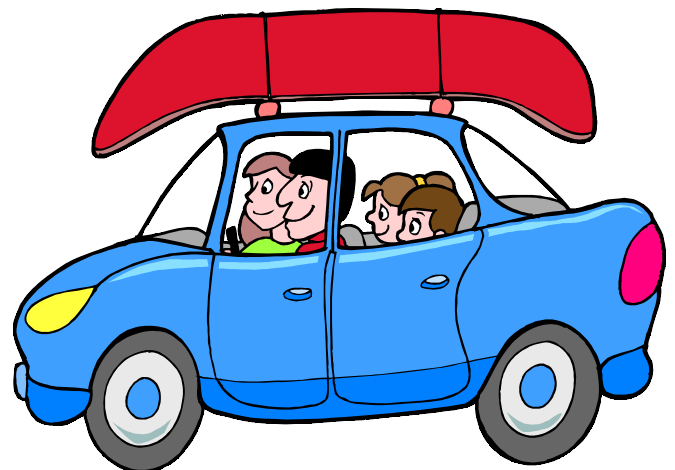
- ◆ Develop outreach programs to invite the use of the National Parks by people who are unfamiliar with them and by those who currently make little or no use of them.
- ◆ Diversify the attractions and activities available at the National Parks, individually and collectively, to accommodate new and various interests.

- ◆ Broaden the interpretation of the parks so all visitors, regardless of background or interest, can see the relevance of these parks to them.

Does the California State Park System have the same problems as the National Park Service? After all, some see the SPS as a state-level counterpart to the NPS, with a similar emphasis on large nature parks in somewhat remote parts of the state. But, to the contrary, some of our SPS statistics are much better than those of the NPS. Unlike the NPS, the overall attendance at State Parks is increasing. And our campgrounds are full during the busy season and are well used in the shoulder seasons.

By these measures, things look promising for the future of the State Park System. But are they? How can they be, when the broad social and economic factors which are affecting the NPS (the first eight bullets noted above), also affect the SPS? This being the case, how can we *not* have serious concerns, if not today than at least in the near future?

Perhaps, like the National Park Service, the State Park System needs to act now to strongly reach out to all Californians, especially those beyond our long-standing visitor base. Perhaps the System's professionals need to work more than they ever have to imaginatively redesign their programs and refocus some of their efforts in order to ensure a good place for the System in the minds, affections and political priorities of tomorrow's Californians. Keeping to business-as-usual today will reduce our relevance tomorrow.




~~Housing and Open Space~~ HCD is continuing the housing policy and reviewing the housing elements of local General Plans for compliance. Similarly, DPR field staff often have a role in reviewing local General Plans and how they might affect nearby State Parks. An awareness of HCD goals may help support State Park staff in responding to local general plans. When DPR staff comments on a general plan, it was suggested that they may send a copy of DPR's response to HCD.

Another area where HCD can coordinate with DPR is in providing data from population and job growth studies, including projections of housing demand. This information can be useful in local needs assessment and specifically in addressing the Central Valley Strategy (see BEAR FACTS, page 4).

Ruth Coleman explained that there are 3 major areas of coordination with HCD: broad policy, planning (such as the Central Valley Strategy) and grants. There may be opportunities for coordinating matching grants and funding park infrastructure between the two agencies.

On the broad policy level, coordination can occur with regard to smart growth and the rural/urban interface. DPR looks at the State Park System lands available to different communities, the need for new parks and need for new development within parks.

Currently a brochure on the urban interface is being prepared by the Natural Resource Division of DPR. It explains issues about the effects of housing close to parklands. Domestic animals, illegal dumping and wildfire threats are among the negative impacts from housing close to parks and wildlands.

The meeting with Cathy Creswell provided a greater mutual understanding of the issues related to housing, parks and open space. Both agencies shared common ground in their commitment to planning and building better communities for California's people. 

Which Park and Why?

Can you guess which State Park unit has had the following major development project completed over last couple of years?

1. This project made major repairs and improvements to a dam on the Eel River. The project replaced/reinforced the upstream and downstream aprons and the two central weir sections of the dam that had eroded.
2. The project reconstructed, restored and modified a number of buildings to better interpret the historic period. The project included a Baptist church, a general store, library, hotel, drug store, several houses, a train depot and more.
3. The project included installation of perimeter fencing and gates, installation of safety fencing, installation of signs and emergency stabilization of buildings on the recently acquired mining holdings.
4. This project provided a more accessible lake and river shoreline at a river outlet and provided facilities to meet current code and demand. The project demolished two existing restaurants and a restroom building and constructed a new restroom building and other public use and site improvements.
5. The project constructed approximately 1,000 square feet of visitor center space as an addition to the lifeguard tower/station building to provide an area for public gatherings and interpretive exhibits at a State Beach. The project was funded from oil spill mitigation funds.
6. The project developed, constructed and installed new exhibits about a major aspect of California's agricultural history within a visitor center.
7. The project provided entrance road realignment, additional parking, two new comfort stations, new contact station, rehabilitated and added picnic facilities, improved paths of travel within the day use area, and furnished orientation and interpretation in key outdoor locations adjacent to an historic mansion.

(Answers on Page 7)

A Vision for the Great Central Valley

The Department of Parks and Recreation initiated a project in June 2003 to develop a strategy that will identify our current, near-term and future vision for the State Park System in the Great Central Valley, which consists of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys.


Significant acquisition funding for State Parks was made available through Propositions 12 and 40; however, less than 8% of Proposition 40 went to the Department's acquisition program. With few exceptions, the Department focused on acquiring properties in Southern California and along the coast, and largely overlooked properties in the Great Central Valley.

To test the assumption that the State Park System is not visible to many Valley residents, Acting Director Ruth Coleman initiated the Central Valley Strategy project to develop a blueprint, or roadmap, for future bond acts to identify funds for future land acquisitions and facility developments.

The Great Central Valley's geographic area ranges from roughly the northern side of the Tehachapi's to Red Bluff, a distance of about 450 miles and encompassing 18 counties. The east-west boundary falls around the 2,500' to 3,000' foot elevation in the foothills, recognizing that some sections are defined by U.S. Forest Service lands. The Department manages 32 units within this area, with a total acreage at 94,700 acres, or 7% of the total State Park System acreage. Interestingly, these same units also receive 7% of the total annual State Park visitation.

A partial list of challenges to the Great Central Valley includes explosive population growth (expected to increase by 46% by the year 2020), changes in development patterns, and water supply issues. Similarly, the demographic make up of Valley residents will undergo dynamic changes. The 2000 census reported 5 ½ million residents in the Great Central Valley. By 2010 this population should increase to nearly 7 million and by 2020 it will reach 8.2 million.

To learn more about the opinions of local decision makers regarding future land purchases, existing unit expansions, and partnership opportunities with other public agencies, the Department is hosting selected small focus group meetings. Specifically, the Department is interested in identifying cultural themes and sites that are important in portraying the Valley's rich history. It is also interested in properties that possess unique natural resource attributes or are ecologically diverse and lands that can be readily developed to increase the number and variety of outdoor recreation opportunities near population centers.

Ultimately, it is believed that this strategy may be used in part to craft future funding programs, as well as a guide for future State Park System acquisition and development projects in this key geographic and demographic portion of the state. 



Do You Have a Plan?

The Planning Division would like you to have your own copy of *The California State Park System Plan 2002, Parts I and II*. Initially, these publications were distributed on a limited basis. However, they are now available to all employees and other interested parties.

This plan examines the challenges facing the State Park System, including population growth, diversity and shifting preferences. It will guide the State Park System over the next decade, in advancing core programs and implementing key initiatives.

If you would like a copy of the plan for yourself or for employees in your office or district, please contact Adrienne Tillis at (916) 653-9901 or at atill@parks.ca.gov.

New State Parks for June 30, 2003

You may have heard that the California State Park System has grown in size from 273 to 277 classified units or major unclassified properties in the last fiscal year. Four new units were added, one in San Bernardino County, one in Riverside County and two in Alameda County.

The first new unit is Wildwood Canyon, located near Yucaipa in San Bernardino County. It recently figured in the news when a wildfire burned about 125 acres in and around the park in mid August. Although CDF had plans to do a prescribed burn in the area, conditions were always too dangerous to proceed, and so firefighters took no chances with this fire.

The natural topography in Wildwood Canyon ranges from 3000 to 5000 feet and the area is home to over 1000 species of plants and animals and a rich variety of habitats. Cultural sites from the Gabrielino and Serrano peoples dot the landscape. The area functioned as an important trading route prehistorically and a site in the nearby Yucaipa Valley actually contained goods imported from the far away Southwest Pueblos. Later activities in the Canyon included grazing related to the San Gabriel Mission from 1812, gold mining by early Mexicanos in 1839, and European settlers raising hogs in the 1840s and 50s-giving rise to its first English name—Hog Canyon.


Recreational opportunities abound in Wildwood Canyon. Several trails wind through forested canyons and up onto ridge tops with spectacular views. Some connect to adjacent community trails and future connections to the Pacific Crest and Santa Ana River Trails are planned. Parts of the Canyon might accommodate future developed camping with minimal impacts to natural features.

The next unit, San Timoteo Canyon, is located near Lake Perris State Recreation Area in Riverside County. The Canyon serves as a primary migration route for many animal species through links to the San Geronio/San Jacinto Mountains, Lake Perris State Recreation Area, the Box Springs Mountain Park

and the Santa Ana River basin. The Canyon is home to six endangered animal species and over twenty species of threatened plants and is considered unique for the quantity of habitats in such a small area. The various vegetation communities range from established riparian forests and wetlands to drier chaparral and coastal sagebrush, with grassy meadows and oak woodlands in between.

San Timoteo Canyon was part of the Native American Cocomaricopa Trail, connecting the Colorado River with the Pacific Ocean, and a boundary between the Serrano and Cahuillan tribes. The Cahuillans, led by Chief Juan Antonio, defeated the notorious Irving Gang in 1852. Chief Antonio, who died of smallpox in 1862, is buried behind the 1894 San Timoteo Schoolhouse, the oldest schoolhouse in Riverside County.

The two remaining units are classified as State Marine Reserves: Albany State Marine Reserve and Emeryville Crescent State Marine Reserve, both in Alameda County and within Eastshore State Park. State Marine Reserves are completely non-terrestrial marine areas where no commercial or recreational 'extractive' activities are allowed, such as the taking of animals, plants or natural features. This type of Marine Managed Area is intended to protect and conserve various types of marine resources, including living plants and animals and their habitats, creating a special kind of underwater wilderness. Point Lobos State Reserve has a similar marine component but Albany and Emeryville are the first wholly underwater Reserves to be added to the State Park System.

The Emeryville Crescent and the Albany Reserves, both on the East side of San Francisco Bay, are home to some of the greatest concentrations of shorebirds in the entire Bay. The sites may have 14,000 shorebirds at one time during the fall and winter, all feeding on the mudflats to recoup the energy they expended on their migratory journey from the Arctic, and preparing for their return journey and nesting season in the spring and summer. The Crescent is located in the curve of I-80 westbound, where 250,000 cars a day pass close by en route to the Bay Bridge. 

California History Plan Underway

The first update to the California History Plan in almost 30 years is underway. Director Ruth Coleman initiated the planning process, calling for an analysis of cultural resource gaps that may exist in the State Park System. The California History Plan will address some statewide issues and guide the System's future acquisition and development programs.

Staff from the Planning, Interpretation and Education, Cultural Resources, and Field Services Divisions are working with staff from the Office of Historic Preservation, the Southern Service Center and the California State Railroad Museum on the Plan's Steering Committee. Expertise in interpretation, archaeology, history, and historic preservation is being brought to bear on the thorny issue of how to ensure that the richness of our State's written, oral and material history is collected, preserved and presented in a meaningful way to all Californians and visitors.

A draft Conceptual Framework has been developed that transcends specific sites, dates and cultural chronologies. Instead, it connects Californians in multiple, interwoven ways to their shared cultural heritage through overlapping themes:


- California People
- People and the Environment
- Developing Economies
- Governing California
- Expressing Intellectual and Cultural Life
- Social and Community Life

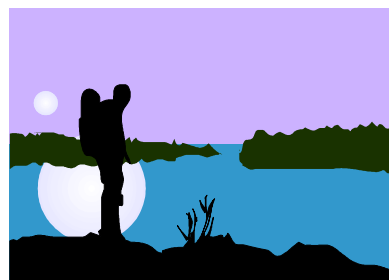
The completed California History Plan will direct the interpretation of current State Park resources and may also be valuable to national, state and local cultural resource managers within California. Meetings of expert advisory panels will include scholarly researchers, agency cultural resource managers and heritage preservation specialists from throughout the state. The approach will be inclusive, seeking the advice and expertise of a wide variety of cultural resource professionals. The California History Plan should be completed some time in 2004. Linda McDonald of the Planning Division is the project manager. For more information, contact lmcdonald@parks.ca.gov.

New State Parks Trails Policy

A growing number of new special user groups, not just mountain bikers and equestrians, want legal access to more trails. The current mountain bike and equestrian trail users are reluctant to allow increased access, creating numerous management issues that are being handled differently by each district. The single, 15-year-old State Park policy on mountain bike trail use doesn't really address this complex problem. The special user groups, with their well-developed communication networks, have been using these administrative inconsistencies to debate superintendents' decisions on which trails would be multi-use and which wouldn't.

A Trails Policy Committee was recently formed to help resolve these issues and help superintendents and field specialists make more informed decisions on trail use designations. Tom Ward, Dave Vincent, Noah Tilghman, Nancy Fuller, Karl Knapp, and Marla Hastings are on the committee which is chaired by Ken McKowen. After working through numerous differences of opinion on resource protection, safety and enforcement, recreation opportunities, and District program and budget impacts, the committee has developed a draft comprehensive Trails Policy designed to replace the existing Mountain Bike Policy.

This new Trails Policy will provide for a consistent District and park unit process for determining the appropriate trail usage designation (single use, multi-use, etc.) within the many diverse state park units. The Policy emphasizes overall park unit trail planning that includes adequate public participation and regional trail connection considerations. Draft copies of the proposed policy are currently being reviewed by park superintendents and additional specialists. 



The Excellent City Park System


As another valued contribution to the park and recreation profession, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) has made and just published a study on what factors make for a top-quality park system in a major urban area. Author Peter Harnik, in his publication, *The Excellent City Park System*, identifies seven key factors for a park agency's success. These factors may not be all that astonishing, but they are surely rock-solid. They are critical things for any public agency park professional to focus on, regardless of his or her organizational level, be it city, county, state or federal.

A two-day brainstorming effort by two dozen experts in city parks and public land policy identified and characterized the following seven "factors of excellence" that mark a good city park system:

- ◆ A clear expression of purpose
- ◆ An ongoing planning and community involvement process
- ◆ Sufficient assets in land, staffing and equipment to meet the system's goals
- ◆ Equitable access
- ◆ User satisfaction
- ◆ Safety from crime and physical hazards
- ◆ Benefits for the city beyond the boundaries of the parks

After characterizing what was meant by an excellent city park system, the seven factors were explored in some detail, with useful examples provided outside the main text in sidebars or highlighted boxes.

These seven factors were then used by TPL staff in making a study of the park systems of 55 major American cities. Eight of these cities were in California: Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco and San Jose. In this study, comparative figures were created for such factors as acreage per 1000 residents, parkland acreage as a percent of the entire city area, and dollars per resident spent on parks.

This report may be found on the TPL website. Its main office is at 116 New Montgomery Street, San Francisco, 94103; (415) 495-4041. 

Answers to Which Parks and Why?:


(From page 3)

1. Benbow Lake SRA - Benbow Dam Repair
2. Colonel Allensworth SHP - Restoration, Phase I
3. Bodie SHP - Health and Safety Mitigation
4. Tahoe SRA - Restoration and Rehabilitation of Truckee River Outlet Parcel
5. Bolsa Chica SB - Visitor Center
6. California Citrus SHP - Visitor Center Exhibits
7. Sugar Pine Point SP - Rehabilitation of Day Use Area

New Publications Available

The Planning Division is publishing and will soon make available two publications full of data on the State Park System. *Bear Facts* readers who need a copy of one or more of these documents, but who has not received one in the next few weeks, may contact Adrienne Tillis at (916) 653-9901 or at atill@parks.ca.gov. These new publications are:

California State Park System Statistical Report: 2001/02 Fiscal Year. The first statistical report to be produced in more than a decade, this reference document provides key information for the subject year, along with selected data which will bridge the gap between it and the date that the last report that was made. Note that 2001-02 is two fiscal years ago; a report on the immediately past 2002-03 fiscal year is currently being developed.

Planning Milestones for the Park Units and Major Properties Associated with the California State Park System (7-1-03 edition). This annual reference document reports on the naming, classification and general planning that has been done for the State Park System's current set of 277 units and properties. It also provides historical information on more than 200 units and properties whose identities have changed or which are no longer in the park system. 

Bear Facts

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2004 Trails Conference

The 20th California Trails and Greenways Conference will be held March 25-28, 2004, in the historic Gold Rush town of Folsom. Sessions are being planned on trail building, GIS/GPS, grant writing, and much more, along with a special outdoor barbecue dinner featuring living history performers from Sutter's Fort. Opportunities for hikes, bike rides, kayak tours and horse-back riding will also be available.

For more information contact Ken McKowen at kmcko@parks.ca.gov (916-653-6501) or Doug Wilber at dwilb@parks.ca.gov (916-651-6916).

As information regarding sponsorships and registration becomes available, it will be posted at www.parks.ca.gov/trails.

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